

Assembly Studies Ways to Halt Dangers of Castor Bean Plants

By VINCENT THOMAS
 Assemblyman, 68th District
 danger young children, because of their inquisitive activities, frequently expose themselves to hazards which can threaten their health or safety. Sometimes these haz-

ards are of a nature which can be brought under control by legislative action, so the need for such action is directed to our attention. The dangers to children of pilofilm bags, discarded old-fashioned refrigerators, unguarded well-openings,

are matters of this type which have previously received our consideration. At our last session, our attention was called to another problem of this kind. That is the danger of poisoning from the seeds of castor bean plants. A bill to limit possession of such plants was introduced, but action was deferred pending further study. The Assembly interim committee on agriculture recently held a public hearing on the measure, and other hearings are anticipated. A few

municipal control ordinances have been passed.

THE COMMITTEE was told that approximately 30 children in one county alone are known to have been poisoned because they innocently ate castor beans broadcast by plants grown as ornamental shrubs. The seeds come in all sizes, shapes, and colors, but most of them closely resemble edible beans, and they are shot from their spiny capsules over wide areas. Not only is the plant commonly used as a shrub, but it also grows wild along many roadsides.

The difficulty in drafting suitable legislation to control the growing of the castor bean is that the plant has considerable commercial importance. Some 2,000 acres were grown in California this year, and the acreage is expected to increase rapidly in years to come. The seeds yield a high quality oil, which has been in use since Biblical days. In addition to its well-known use in medicine, and its use as a lubricant in complex and delicate machinery, the oil is valuable in printing, dyeing and the manufacture of paints, plastics, and textiles such as rayon and nylon.

OUR ARMED FORCES need castor oil for flexible wire coverings, hydraulic system fluids, and explosives. The oil was

high on the critical list during World War II. Because most of our supply came from India and Brazil, its use was carefully controlled. Since the war, castor bean cultivation has been encouraged to meet any future national emergency, and scientists are working to produce the best seed stocks and plants most adaptable to machine seeding and harvesting.

The bill as introduced, proposed to exempt commercial growing and processing of castor beans but would require fencing of all fields. To aid in controlling the growth of wild plants on unimproved private or public lands, it would have required removal of all plants on such land within 48 hours of filing of a written notice that the plants existed.

OPponents of the measure pointed out that none of these provisions, as originally drafted, was practical. While admitting the castor bean is poisonous, it was argued that some 40 other plants grow in California which are poisonous, such as oleander, loco weed, and Johnson grass, but no control program for them are suggested.

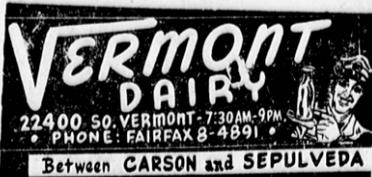
Proponents of the measure appeared willing to iron out the kinks in the exemption and notice sections, but argued strongly in favor of prohibiting use



ENDS COURSE . . . Earl Brugman, registered representative with MJT Mutual Funds, Inc., of Torrance, recently completed a course of advanced training in the field of estate planning. Brugman is married and resides at 1723 Juniper Ave.

of castor beans as ornamental shrubs. They pointed out that the other poisonous plants mentioned are not attractive to children, so the seeds are not eaten. They maintained the castor, like the marijuana plant, needs legislative control.

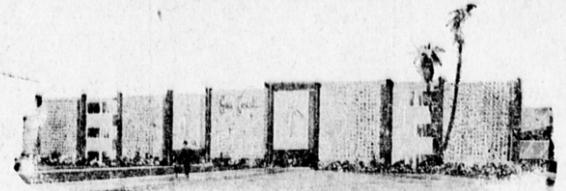
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